

REMARKS

Claims 1, 2 and 4-41 remain pending in the application. Independent Claims 1, 13, 18 and 29 have been amended, as well as dependent Claims 2, 4, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21 and 39.

The Examiner objected to the Drawings for failing to meet various formal requirements as more particularly set forth in the Office Action. The Examiner also objected to the Drawings for failing to include all reference numbers utilized in the Specification. Submitted herewith are corrected drawings in which the bases for the foregoing objections have been corrected.

The Examiner objected to the Specification based on informalities set forth in the Office Action. Appropriate correction has been made by virtue of the amendment to the Specification.

The Examiner objected to Claim 1 identifying informalities which have been corrected with the foregoing amendments.

The Examiner rejected Claims 14-17 under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph as being indefinite since they represent method claims but depended from an apparatus claim. These claims have been corrected to depend from a method claim.

The Examiner rejected all independent claims, namely Claims 1, 13, 18 and 29, under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Van Bilderbeek (USP 6,092,596) (hereinafter, "596"). Applicant traverses these rejections on the grounds that the reference does not show each and every element of the limitations set forth in Applicant's amended claims.

The sealing system of the present invention comprises a metal-to-metal seal. To form such a seal, the full inner circumferential surface of an outer pipe must be in contact with the full outer circumferential surface of an inner pipe under the application of an inward radial force to the outer circumference of a tubular member. In order to effect sealing, the external apparatus must be

adjacent the sealing surfaces. The metal-to-metal seal is effected by compressing the adjacent metal surfaces of tubular members. The metal surfaces are the walls of the tubular members themselves, such that an inner diameter wall surface is compressed against an outer diameter wall surface of axially aligned tubular members. Thus, references to a "sealing zone" refers to the metal contact surface area on the tubular member itself. Clearly, these surface areas must be sufficiently smooth and free of debris that they are capable of forming a metal seal when compressed against one another. Moreover, in order to form a seal, the metal-to-metal contact must extend around the full circumference without a break in the contact, such as would be present from a rough surface or slotting or flutting along one of the contact surfaces. In this regard, an even application of pressure around the full circumference is necessary.

With particular reference to Fig. 4 of '596, the apparatus includes a flow-by passage 60 that permits fluid to flow through a contact zone adjacent the compression ring 64. Col. 6, line 7. In order to actually cause a seal between the inner and outer casings in the system of the cited reference, a resilient annular seal 62 is utilized. Moreover, all of the casings in the areas of the compression ring of the '596 patent include slotting, such as is shown at 13 in Fig. 1, to permit flow-by. Col. 5, line 3; Col. 8, line 41. Since all of the casings adjacent the compressing ring include slots, the apparatus and system of the '596 is not capable of yielding a full circumferential metal-to-metal seal which is the subject of the instant application.

Likewise, in order to achieve such a seal, compression must be evenly applied around the full circumference of the outer tubular member, which is not taught in the '596 patent. The reason is that '596 does not teach the creation of a metal-to-metal seal by virtue of the compressed surfaces. Rather, '596 teaches the inward deflection of a portion of a tube in order to cause the deflected tube to clamp another tube therein. The creation of a tubular seal differs from merely the deflection of the clamping tube, the distinction being taught at Page 10, lines 3-9 of the Application. For this reason, the '596 reference does not teach each and every limitation of the claims. The Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw the rejections under 35 USC 102(b) based on '596 and pass these claims to allowance.

The Examiner rejected Claims 3, 4, 15, 16, 24-28, 32 and 33 under 35 U.S.C. 103 as being unpatentable over '596 in view of Koleilat et al. (USP 5,996,695) (hereinafter, "'695"). Applicant traverses these rejections on the grounds that the references, whether alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest each and every element of the limitations set forth in Applicant's claims.

The Examiner relied on '596 to teach metal-to-metal sealing surfaces (which Applicant traverses). The Examiner relied on '695 as teaching resilient seals or o-rings, referenced as 20 in Fig 4 thereof. While '695 does illustrate o-rings, they are disposed in a bushing fitted around the end of casing stub 11. The resilient seals or o-rings of '695 are not (i) in the sealing zone as claimed by Applicant, (ii) activated by an external compression system as claimed by Applicant; and (iii) located adjacent the external compression system. In fact, the '695 patent could be said to teach away from the Applicant's claimed arrangement because the '695 patent does not position an o-ring or resilient seal anywhere near what is referred to in the reference as the slip area 14, where a slip ring 40 and slip bowl 42 are used to compress against casing 11.

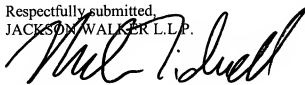
In short, neither '596 or '695 teach the positioning of a resilient seal in a seal zone that is activated by an external compression system as claimed by the Applicant. Since neither references teaches or suggests such an arrangement, then the combination of the two references cannot be relied upon to teach or suggest such an arrangement. As such, the rejection of the claims based on the foregoing combination of references should be withdrawn.

Applicant has amended the claims to clarify the structure of the invention and to clarify the functions of the claimed invention. However, amendments have not been made to narrow the claims of the original application but, rather simply, to clarify claims due to grammar that the Examiner found unclear.

Based on the foregoing, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw the rejections of independent Claims 1, 13, 18 and 29 and pass these claims to allowance. Likewise, since each independent claim is allowable, the Examiner is respectfully requested to pass all dependent claims to allowance as well.

If the Examiner feels that a telephone conference with the undersigned would be helpful to the allowance of this application, a telephone conference is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,
JACKSON WALKER L.L.P.

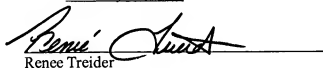


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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I hereby certify that this paper (along with any paper referred to as being attached or enclosed) is being deposited on the date shown below with the United States Postal Service, with sufficient postage as First Class Mail (37 CFR 1.8(a)), in an envelope addressed to Mail Stop Response/FEE, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA, 22313-1450.

Date: February 13, 2006


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